

# A Wicked Thing



— From The Award Winning Author —

**Michael Kasenow**

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*MICHAEL KASENOW*

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[michaelkasenow.com](http://michaelkasenow.com)



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1094 New DeHaven Street, Suite 100  
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Toll-free (877) BUY BOOK  
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*FOR ELSIE*

# ONE

The mist comes in slowly, quietly, and with it are legends and myths. Waves can be heard gently caressing the shore, but the bay cannot be seen. At its thickest, porch lights and ship lights are diffused, like bright, round stars in a cloudy, gray nebula. Often, a mysterious splash or the flutter of wings breaks the solitude. The mist comes in at night or in the very early morning when temperature differences are extreme. Few venture into the mist when it comes. Ships remain anchored. Waves move in and out, and foghorns groan long and deep.

The mist did not intimidate Gwen or any of her neighbors. They were raised with the image and lore, like the call of a wolf or flight of a hawk. It was expected, and without it, St. Martins would be less of a personality. Gwen wrote about the mist and the ghosts that came to look through it, a window between life and death. For this, she was teased, but she was a gracious woman, gregarious in spirit, so she welcomed the attention, especially if it helped sell her book. “They rarely visit through the mist,” she had claimed as an expert. “Death would then dress them in rags and decay; they would be frightful and ugly—enduring a pain the living cannot comprehend. If they cross into this world, it is only for the most important reason—an urgent cause beyond rational understanding. For such a cause, they will sacrifice their pain, but this is rare.”

Stephen loved and enjoyed Gwen and her eccentricities. He could be annoyed by her odd quirks, but he tolerated them because she was worth the trouble. Stephen and Gwen

Burns were known for their generosity and trusting natures. They were both intuitive, but Stephen was less so. In their sixties, they often sat together, enjoying each other in the privacy of comfortable habits. Gwen was the portly one. Stephen aged with a healthy dignity; Gwen made sure he ate the right foods.

From their back porch, behind tall windows that looked down into their long yard, Gwen peered into the mist while Stephen enjoyed a novel by Robert Louis Stevenson, one he had read many times before and would surely read again.

“It’s a thick one tonight, Stephen,” Gwen said. “This is often when they come for a peek.”

Stephen, sitting near the glow of a stained-glass lamp, tried to ignore her with an “Mmm,” as he turned a page.

The couple looked supernatural, although Stephen would deny it. The rooms in their old Victorian were filled with stacks of old magazines and dusty books, and antique furniture that had been passed down from generation to generation. These small fortunes were bequeathed to the living; therefore, hamlets and villages in New Brunswick had no need for furniture boutiques.

“So, let me guess,” Gwen teased. “Jim and Long John die at the end of this reading?”

“And which ghost are you seeing tonight?” Stephen teased back.

“If you say please, perhaps I’ll fill your coffee cup,” Gwen said knowingly.

“Please,” Stephen replied.

Gwen stood up with her cup in hand and stopped suddenly—she was sure she saw something move in the mist. She kept a steady gaze into the suspended moisture; she stared with a hunter’s sight, her eyes piercing through the mist like an arrow flies. Then she saw it again. The figure of a man moved; he appeared to be tall and steady. He looked back from the mist, a ghost of a figure. “Stephen, I see something.”

“Right,” Stephen answered without looking up. “The coffee will get cold. I did say please.”

“No really—look!”

Stephen glanced up from his book and took off his glasses. He looked hard but saw nothing, only the thick, bright gray mist. “There’s nothing, Gwen. Nothing.”

“There was!” she proclaimed. “I’m telling you, I saw something. A man.”

“It’s usually a woman,” he corrected wryly.

“This time a man, tall and handsome—I think.”

Stephen smiled and went back to his book. “Tall and handsome,” he muttered.

The figure appeared again, casually looking here and there, as if it was trying to figure something out or looking for a door. “There he is again!” Gwen barked.

“OK,” said Stephen, bored.

The figure dissipated into the gray, reappeared, and dissipated again. “I’m telling you, there’s a man out there!” Gwen said. She took Stephen’s book and closed it quick. “Out there!” she pointed.

“Gwen, if you didn’t want to get the coffee—” he said with a smile.

“Oh hells-bells!” Gwen responded, frustrated and anxious. Then just-like-that, she went out their porch door and scurried down the wood steps.

“Gwen! Damn it!” Stephen watched, exasperated.

She moved hurriedly but cautiously down through their long yard in the cool grass. Her slippers were easily soaked. She tightened her cotton robe to keep out the chill as she reached the drifting wall of mist, a boundary that was easy to cross. She peered into the mist as if she was looking through a big foggy window. Nothing moved inside. She waved her hand gently and stirred the hazy moisture. It floated, weightless and wispy, but Gwen saw nothing move. “I know I saw what I saw,” she said to herself.

Gwen heard a small splash of water on her right, and to her left, Gwen spotted the dim silhouette of her mystery man. He moved into and out of her vision, gray on gray. “Who’s there?” she called out, but the shadow did not respond. “Who are you? What do you want?” This time, the shadow turned to her voice. “Can I help you? Are you lost? You’re going to drown out there. The water gets deep quickly when the tide’s in.”

The foggy, gray figure stared in Gwen’s direction. He was deep in the mist and appeared to be floating away. Gwen moved into the mist until the bright gray moisture surrounded her. She could see nothing. Even her hands were difficult to see. She moved into the tide, looking, staring, the water was above her knees. Quiet was everywhere. Gray was everywhere. A cool, wet feeling filled her senses. She moved into deeper water, isolated and confused. Then came the splish-splash sound of feet running to her left, toward her neighbor’s rental. Gwen felt a sudden, tight tug on her arm. “Have you gone crazier than usual,” Stephen scolded. He took her by the arm, and they backed out of the bay and onto the cobbles, leaving the mist.

“My God, Gwen,” you could’ve walked to your death. This is the Bay of Fundy remember? You were born and raised here?”

Gwen’s robust face gazed up at Stephen with confusion.

“Gwen, are you alright?”

“Stephen, there’s a man in the mist.”

“A man?”

“I saw the shadow of a man. I know what I saw.”

“Where is this man?”

“I—don’t know.” Gwen turned and again peered into the mist. She heard waves lapping at the shore and saw the auras of ship lights straining to get through the mist. “There was a man, Stephen, something or someone in the mist. I know what I saw.”



“Again?”

“Yes,” she replied.

“Something?”

“Something.”

“If I didn’t love you so much,” he responded. “I’d throw you back in. Come on, you’re wet to your knees. We both are. Let’s get to high ground and dry off.”

They moved up toward their Victorian, over the wet cobbles and into the cool grass. Stephen’s arm was around the only woman he had ever loved. “You drive me crazy,” he said with a light laugh.

“Oh dear,” Gwen smiled, a bit shaken. “I owe you a cup of coffee.”

They moved up their steps and closed their porch door. Stephen looked out into the mist. He saw nothing but the starry haze. Gwen picked up their cups and went for the coffee. “Get dry first,” Stephen said.

“You too,” she said.

“Right, I’ll do the same.”

“I’ll make some tea instead,” Gwen suggested.

When she left the porch, Stephen looked back into the mist, deeper this time, but still he saw nothing—only the bright dots of ship lights cutting through the gray. Nothing moved. Nothing could be seen. He thought about his wife and her confused state. She had seen ghosts before, but they never troubled her. These apparitions were like a hobby. She was a good storyteller, so her friends listened. For a few moments, Stephen weighed the odds. He was concerned, but about what he did not know? He locked their back door. He did the same to their front door. They rarely locked their doors. No one locked their doors in St. Martins.

A foghorn moaned.